

# News Release

## *Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 10, 2006**  
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### **Wildfire Forces Closing of Railroad Ditch Entrance for Public Use**

**Suffolk, Virginia** – A wildfire burning in the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge forces the closing of the Railroad Ditch Entrance for all public activities. The wildfire was discovered late Friday afternoon in an area adjacent to the popular access road to Lake Drummond. The fire was most likely the result of a lightning strike earlier in the week that ignited into flames after humidity dropped and temperatures rose on Friday.

The fire has consumed 535 acres in an area of hurricane downed trees and standing dead trees that had been drowned by Hurricane Floyd's high water in 1999. The burning area is on the west bank of Lake Drummond. Containment is at 75%. Refuge personnel are being assisted by approximately 45 fire fighters from near-by North Carolina refuges, US Forest Service, VA-DCR, and private contractors.

Refuge manager, Suzanne Baird reports, "The fire does not pose any threat to lands bordering the refuge. The rain helped us out on Saturday. At this point operations are focusing on drowning the remaining hot spots."

The Great Dismal Swamp area has historically had a moderate to high incidence of wildland fires, capable of becoming large or causing significant natural resource damage, especially to the organic, or peat soils of the swamp. The swamp's soils ignite when they are dry, and these ground fires are difficult to detect. They may smolder for days or weeks following a lightning strike until conditions become favorable to ignite surface vegetation. Fortunately, ground water levels are still high in the spring, aiding to the quick containment of this fire.

The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The 111,200 acre refuge was established in 1974 to protect the unique swamp ecosystem and is one of the largest wildlife refuges on the east coast.

